GLAAD TV Report: LGBTQ+ Representation, Driven by Four Creators, Dips

For the first time in years, LGBTQ+ representation on television has fallen.

According to GLAAD's latest Where We Are on TV report, 70 of the 773 series regular characters on 2020 broadcast TV's scripted prime-time shows could be classified as members of the community (9.1 percent). That's a dip from last year's all-time high of 10.2 percent.

More troublingly, these characters are clustered in shows helmed by only four Hollywood power players: out creators Greg Berlanti, Lena Waithe, and Ryan Murphy and ally Shonda Rhimes. Collectively, their 16 series accounted for 17 percent of all LGBTQ+ representation (62 of 360 characters).

Megan Townsend, GLAAD's director of entertainment research and analysis, noted that some of 2020's biggest critical and commercial hits, including Schitt's Creek, The Haunting of Bly Manor, and Veneno, centered on LGBTQ+ stories. Thus, networks and streaming services should take note in creating new content so that inclusion doesn't stay "concentrated" and continue to decline.

"It must be a priority to introduce nuanced and diverse LGBTQ characters in 2021 and beyond, ensuring that this year’s decreases do not become reverse progress as the industry continues to evolve and adjust to this unique era’s challenges," Townsend stated in a release.

This representation is essential as television plays a growing part in people's lives during a pandemic, which worldwide has drastically limited in-person entertainment options. Viewers over age 18 are now watching upward of 37 hours of TV per week, according to a Nielsen survey of the first quarter of 2020.

Sarah Kate Ellis, GLAAD’s president and CEO, stressed, "In the midst of a destructive pandemic, a long overdue cultural reckoning with racial injustice, and a transition into a new political era for this country, representation matters more than ever as people turn to entertainment storytelling for connection and escape.

“This time of unprecedented change matched with increased demand represents an opportunity to break new ground with stories we have not seen before and create LGBTQ characters that do not reinforce harmful stereotypes.”

Specifically, the report singled out the near absence of HIV-positive characters on television as an area for improvement. There are only three characters living with HIV on air — all on FX's Pose — a decrease from last year's count of nine. This is despite GLAAD's prior findings that nine in 10 Americans believe stigma is still an issue.

In response, GLAAD is asking the entertainment industry to introduce at least three LGBTQ+, HIV-positive characters in broadcast or streaming shows.

“Hollywood must tell these stories that not only entertain, but which also have the opportunity to inform and educate its audiences,” said DaShawn Usher, GLAAD’s program officer—communities of color and HIV and AIDS advocate. “While there have been so many advances and developments in HIV education, prevention, and treatment, I cannot say the same when it comes to Hollywood telling these diverse and compelling stories.”

https://www.advocate.com/television/2021/1/14/glaad-tv-report-lgbtq-representation-driven-four-creators-dips